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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
Eighteenth session
6-17 May 1996

DRAFT REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly;"

and requested the Committee and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee, approved its report and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group, 1/ reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in resolution 34/182, and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. At its organizational session in 1980, the Committee agreed that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to forty-ninth sessions, the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee, approved its reports 2/ and recommendations, and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in resolution 34/182 (resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162, 43/60, 44/50, 45/76, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B and 49/38 B). At its fiftieth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee 3/ and adopted its consensus recommendations (resolutions 50/31 A and B). The Assembly further requested the Committee to report to it at its fifty-first session.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session the Assembly appointed Malta a member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, it appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe; and at its forty-fourth session, it appointed Nepal.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay members of the Committee. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 members, and appointed Burkina Faso a member of the Committee.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 79 to 81 members, and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal members of the Committee.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 81 to 83 members, and appointed Gabon and Israel members of the Committee.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 83 to 88 members, and appointed Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakstan and South Africa members of the Committee.

10. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 88 to 89 members, and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea a member of the Committee.

11. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Argentina
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zimbabwe

II. ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS

A. Opening of the session

12. The organizational meeting of the eighteenth session of the Committee was held at United Nations Headquarters on 6 May 1996. The session was opened by the Chairman, Mr. Ivan Maximov (Bulgaria). Two Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur were elected to fill unexpired terms on the extended Bureau for 1995-1996.

13. World Press Freedom Day (3 May) was commemorated at the meeting. The President of the General Assembly, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral, gave a statement, which was followed by a minute of silence in honour of all slain journalists around the world. The Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information read the message of the Secretary-General and made his own statement. The Chairman also addressed the Committee on the occasion. Subsequently, the Chairman made an introductory statement and the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information delivered his address on the progress achieved in the work of the Department of Public Information pertaining to the agenda items under consideration.

B. Election of officers

14. To fill the posts vacated by elected members of the Bureau, and in accordance with the principle of geographic rotation, the Committee elected the following officers to serve until the end of the original term 1995-1996:

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. Holger Martinsen (Argentina)
Mr. Salman Abbasy (Pakistan)

Rapporteur: Mr. Nacerdine Sai (Algeria)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

15. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted, without objection, the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/1996/1):

1. Opening of the session.

2. Election of officers.

3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.

4. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day.

5. Statement by the Chairman.

6. Statement by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information.

7. General debate and consideration of substantive questions:

   (a) Continuation of the examination of United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, and of the need to establish the new international economic order and the new world information and communication order;

   (b) Evaluation and follow-up of the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;

(c) Promotion of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information.

8. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

16. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its eighteenth session at United Nations Headquarters from 7 to 17 May 1996.

17. For consideration of item 7, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on the allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations information centres in 1995 (A/AC.198/1996/2) and on the review of publications by the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/1996/3).

D. Observers

18. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg and Sweden.

19. Representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Union, the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) also attended.

E. Other matters

20. The Committee decided to conduct further informal consultations through the Bureau, the spokespersons of the regional groups, the Group of 77 and China.

III. GENERAL DEBATE AND CONSIDERATION OF SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

21. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee: Algeria, Argentina, Belarus, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burundi, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica (on behalf of the Group of 77), Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Italy (on behalf of the European Union), Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands (on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States), Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Ukraine, Uruguay, United States of America, Venezuela, and Yemen. The observer for Kyrgyzstan also made a statement. The session was addressed by the Assistant Director-General of UNESCO for Communication, Information and Informatics and by a representative of the Department of Public Information.

22. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, all speakers said that the world - and the United Nations - at the end of the twentieth

century faced many new challenges. It was a time to take stock and to reassess, with a view to utilizing new opportunities to work for the common good. The awesome role of information as a tool not only for positive change, but also for negative propaganda, was underscored by many delegations. Today's communications revolution, by making instantaneous dissemination possible to every corner of the globe, they said, was serving to reinforce the power of information in all societies. Since information was one of the most important means for political, economic and social development, many cautioned that it must be used wisely and responsibly. Information must be accurate, objective and respect cultural diversity, according to a number of speakers, and, in this connection, several suggested an international code of conduct relating to flows of information.

23. All speakers addressed the deep significance of the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day and the important values it enshrined. The freedom of information was a fundamental freedom to be cherished as the cornerstone of all other freedoms. All speakers said that journalists should be able to work without fear of intimidation, imprisonment, violence and death in the pursuit of their lawful duty to keep the world informed. One speaker said that in 1995 a record number of 182 journalists were in prison. Another informed the Committee that 20 journalists had been killed since the beginning of 1996. In his words, when journalists were killed, "the first casualty was the truth", and he believed they should be given the same protection afforded to soldiers and diplomats. One speaker paid tribute to the staff member of the United Nations information centre in Algiers, who had been brutally killed. Another speaker noted that journalists had an added responsibility to exercise a strong sense of judgement and objectivity in their profession to contribute to the promotion of democratic principles and foster social and economic development.

24. The speaker representing UNESCO said that, with the emergence of a new world order, the UNESCO General Conference in November 1989 had adopted a new strategy characterized by support for the free flow of information, wider and better balanced dissemination of information and the strengthening of communications capacities in developing countries. He said also that the UNESCO General Conference had proposed the organization of a press seminar in Europe in 1997. The work being done by UNESCO could be described in two words: democracy and development, he said. In this connection, taking note, among other things, of General Assembly resolution 50/130 on communication for development, UNESCO was organizing the sixth Round Table of Specialized Agencies engaged in communication for development in Harare, Zimbabwe in the second half of 1996.

25. A number of speakers pointed to the continuing importance of a new world information and communication order, which was, in their view, even more relevant in today's increasingly high-technology world. They cautioned that many people in the "global village" would be further marginalized and existing disparities worsened by lack of access to technological innovations. Several speakers underscored that 75 per cent of the mass media was controlled by the developed countries. One speaker suggested that the views of Member States on ways and means of improving communications infrastructure and capabilities in developing countries should still be sought, and suggested extending the deadline for these responses.

26. Many speakers in the general debate expressed their support for the regional seminars on promoting pluralistic and independent media arranged by the Department of Public Information in cooperation with UNESCO. In this connection, the speaker from the Department gave details on the recent Seminar on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Arab Media, held at Sana'a, as well as on the financing of the seminars previously held. One speaker expressed his gratitude for the holding of the Sana'a seminar in his country and spoke of its positive impact. A number of speakers supported the initiative made by UNESCO on the holding of a similar seminar for the States of central and eastern Europe in Bulgaria in 1997 and requested the support of the Department of Public Information. Several delegations also praised the Department's training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries, as well as last year's programme for Palestinian media practitioners. Similarly, a few delegations said the journalists' encounter being planned for Gaza later in 1996 was a very positive project, and called generally for more programmes for Palestinian journalists.

27. One delegation spoke out against the violation of his country's sovereignty and international agreements by a barrage of radio and television broadcasting from another country which he considered oppression. He said that that country had even boosted the power of its transmissions in an effort to manipulate and subvert.

28. In addressing the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, all agreed that the grave financial crisis facing the Organization was inducing a fundamental and necessary restructuring of its operations. One speaker on behalf of a large group said that reform and restructuring in the United Nations, as well as the communications revolution, which was reaching into "our homes, workplaces and the most intimate realms of life", would form the backdrop for the session's deliberations. She pointed to the necessity of positive negotiation, constructive endeavours and joint responsibility. A number of speakers said that the spirit of consensus which had prevailed in the Committee in recent times must continue, as these complicated times required dialogue, not confrontation. One speaker on behalf of another large group said that he was pleased by the work of the extended Bureau and was confident that this collaboration would be strengthened in the future to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Public Information.

29. All delegations agreed that it was increasingly important that the public information function be strengthened further in order for the purposes of the United Nations to be understood fully and support for its work garnered. One speaker pointed to the important meeting of 185 Heads of State or Government, which had given expression to the new times in which the United Nations was operating and the new demands being placed on it. Five high-level working groups were embarking upon different aspects of reform and restructuring. The current financial situation of the Organization, in the view of a number of speakers, could lead to rethinking and restructuring, which could lead to positive efficiency measures. The Department of Public Information had the daunting task of bringing the message of the United Nations to the world in a climate of reduced financial resources and many competing information priorities. Furthermore, all speakers agreed that it was vital to counteract negative perceptions about the United Nations so prevalent in many minds today.

One speaker characterized the United Nations as "under siege" by critics who declared it had outlived its usefulness. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that what was needed was an aggressive marketing strategy to combat mistrust and misinformation in connection with the public perception of the Organization. After all, a number of speakers suggested, the Organization was as good as its Member States made it. One delegation suggested that States should not make political pronouncements that undermined the very Organization where they exercised leadership. Some countries, the speaker said, created the impression that the United Nations was a drain on their finances. He suggested rather that the United Nations, in one way or the other, benefited everyone, and it was important that the world community be sensitized to these benefits. In this connection, several speakers commended the factual updates that the Department of Public Information was producing to counteract negative publicity, such as "Setting the Record Straight" and others.

30. Speakers expressed their sincere appreciation to the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information for his wide-ranging and informative statement and for his - as some said, "impressive" - innovations in the Department. Others said that his approach to public information set the stage for an open and frank dialogue on the present and future of the Department and for increased transparency. Many paid tribute to his hard work and his clear vision in a difficult time, and, in the words of one speaker, his dedication helped to compensate for the cut-backs in resources. One speaker said that his country would make every effort to ensure that the Department had the tools and resources to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, but hard choices had to be made about where to allocate funds. The same speaker said that priorities must be set to maintain or increase resources where they can do the most and to reduce or cut where they are least needed. The same feeling was echoed by several speakers. Many delegations underscored the importance of financing the Department at a level commensurate with its important role in the Organization, as the success of the United Nations depended on people being informed and on support for its activities being generated.

31. All speakers expressed their appreciation also to the staff of the Department, often in the context of the extraordinary level of activities undertaken for the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. One speaker said that it was particularly appropriate to take stock after that milestone year of the Department's abilities in getting the message out. One delegation said that the Department should be more assertive in its information campaigns and should anticipate, rather than merely react. One speaker visualized the work of the Department as concentrating on two areas - the accumulation of material and new ideas, such as through the holding of international art and photography exhibitions, as well as the interactive realm of feedback from non-governmental organizations and citizens world wide through electronic and other means. One delegation reflected its concern about the fiscal impact of mandates originating outside the Committee on Information and, accordingly, supported a provision in the draft resolution addressing this problem.

32. The majority of speakers was supportive of the Department's strategy of strengthening partnerships, especially with the media. A number of speakers were supportive of the Department's links with other departments, as well as its collaborative efforts with other agencies and programmes of the system through

the Joint United Nations Information Committee. Its cooperation with the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in peace-keeping and with UNESCO in the regional media seminars was singled out by a number of speakers as noteworthy.

33. All speakers expressed their strong support and approval for the Department's pioneering efforts in harnessing new information technologies in pursuit of its mandate. They pointed to the increasing dissemination of information materials through electronic means such as the Internet and CD-ROMs as an important means for the Department to communicate with its targeted audiences and to maximize its output. As one speaker said, in the world-wide race to transmit information, the Department had to be competent and competitive. One speaker said that the Department must keep the Committee informed as to what technologies existed, ways and means to improve utilization of these technologies and its plan for their future implementation. Several speakers said that the Department should continue to be a leader in this area, while another voiced the opinion that there had to be a balance of priorities, believing that a focus on technology to the detriment of the human aspects of United Nations goals should be avoided. Many speakers echoed the belief that the fastest possible supply to end-users should be the primary goal of the Department's activities. However, it was important, in the view of a number of speakers, to remain keenly aware of the differing global capacities to accommodate electronic information and respond appropriately. In this connection, a number of speakers said that it should be remembered that print would remain the essential medium for the developing world for the foreseeable future. Several speakers applauded the United Nations home page on the World Wide Web and were pleased with the posting of the daily highlights, briefings and press releases. Several delegations, however, regretted delays in the availability of electronic information. In this connection, one speaker said that he had noted that the latest Security Council documents available on the Internet were extremely out of date.

34. A number of speakers pointed to the valuable service provided to journalists by the Office of the Spokesman of the Secretary-General. Many also voiced their strong appreciation for the press releases issued by the Department, which were of particular value to the smaller missions. Several speakers characterized the releases as of a good quality. Another speaker on behalf of a large group underscored the necessity to continue their publication on all meetings in both working languages and to ensure their timely dissemination, in particular through the use of modern technology. One speaker said that the production of press releases in the two working languages of the United Nations should not suffer from the financial crisis, believing that French speakers had the right to demand access to information and making also the point that the daily highlights should be translated the same day into French and posted on the Internet, as was the case for the English highlights. He also said that at least a summary of the noon briefing in French should be made available.

35. Most speakers pointed to the important role played by the publications of the Department in transmitting the message of the United Nations. One speaker said that in his view, presentation, conciseness and accuracy were of paramount importance. He believed that there had been recent errors of fact made in some

of the fiftieth anniversary materials. One delegation said that in informational materials the term "the former Yugoslavia" should be used carefully, as it had only a selective geographical, rather than political, connotation. Many Committee members singled out certain publications for praise, including the Blue Books series, the Yearbook, the Chronicle, and the World Media Handbook. However, several speakers said that publications must have an identifiable need and be cost-effective, and they urged regular reviews to see if these criteria were being met. One delegation spoke of the importance of maximizing the commercial potential of Department of Public Information publications and audiovisual products. On the other hand, several others cautioned that financial considerations should not deter the Department from the fulfilment of its mandate, which was the widest possible dissemination of its materials. One speaker said that the availability of information materials in the Russian language was limited, although the United Nations information centre in Moscow had intensified efforts to publish in Russian by, among other things, recruiting co-sponsors. Another said that he supported the production of the Blue Books in Arabic, while one speaker regretted in general that publications in Arabic were being cut back and hoped that this situation would be rectified. Another speaker from the same region said that the Department had a responsibility to promote multilingualism in its publications, which he viewed as a very practical obligation in view of the diversity of the world represented by the United Nations.

36. A number of speakers pointed to the importance of disseminating the United Nations message through radio, which was a cost-effective and far-reaching medium. One speaker characterized radio as a voice through which the United Nations could plead the case of multilateralism. One delegation said that there had been great progress in the Department's radio and television output and in particular the quality of broadcasts to the African continent were improved. Several speakers pointed to the value of the electronic radio bulletin board. Another speaker referred to the agreement between the Department and a national organization in his country to facilitate broadcasts on radio stations in Brazil and other Portuguese-speaking countries and looked forward to the strengthening of the Department's broadcasting in Portuguese. Another was appreciative of the work of the Caribbean radio unit. On the other hand, one delegation expressed surprise that there was no staff member responsible for broadcasting to the Middle East, which he viewed as particularly important in connection with the peace process. One delegation suggested that the history of the United Nations should be focused upon and would welcome the production of documentary dramas, perhaps in cooperation with outside collaborators.

37. Many speakers pointed to the important twin platforms - the Agenda for Peace and the Agenda for Development - which were inextricably linked and should be accorded equal priority in the thematic work of the Department. All delegations strongly supported the work of the Department at the earliest stages of peace-keeping missions and were gratified to see that an effective public information capacity for operations was beginning to be put into practice. They viewed the information component as critical to the success of these missions, particularly in regard to targeting the local population in the areas of operations, as well as the public in troop-contributing countries. Several called for the establishment of Department-run radio stations in countries where United Nations peace-keeping operations were established, wherever feasible.

Several speakers noted with appreciation the interdepartmental working group on media strategies for peace-keeping operations and other field operations. One speaker looked forward to the third edition of Blue Helmets and suggested that the names of all those peace-keepers who had laid down their lives in the performance of their duties be reflected in that publication.

38. A number of speakers were encouraged by the important work of the Department in the area of communication for development, and appreciated its work for the current cycle of world conferences, including the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. One speaker noted that Development Update was a valuable publication on the planning and outcome of these United Nations conferences and other topical issues in the development field. Some speakers said that publications on development must get the attention they deserved and, in this connection, expressed regret at the demise of the Development Forum and called for its resumption. One delegation said that information on sustainable socio-economic development for countries in transition would be very well received, and materials issued in languages spoken by the local population in these countries would be beneficial. Several speakers expressed satisfaction about the Department's work in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). Some delegations believed that the Department should focus greater attention on producing information on economic development. One speaker urged more attention to the eradication of poverty, without which there would be no development for many people. As 1996 was the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, he believed that this would provide an opportunity for the Department to place more emphasis on this important subject. One speaker said that sustainable development held the key to global peace. Several speakers pointed to the priority they placed on the Department's ongoing programme of activities aimed at the African continent, especially for the United Nations system-wide Special Initiative on Africa. It was important in their view to make known the needs of Africa and the progress being made in order to correct the erroneous image of the continent and in this connection, several delegations noted the important work of the publication Africa Recovery. Several speakers expressed their appreciation for the work of the Department on the Middle East and the question of Palestine. Some others pointed to the series of activities carried out for the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster and thanked the Department for its efforts, calling for the continuation of activities to raise awareness on this planetary calamity and issues of nuclear safety.

39. In the general debate, many delegations offered opinions and suggestions on the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the network of United Nations information centres, both of which they believed to be rich sources of United Nations information, unique outreach tools and vital components for promoting global awareness about the United Nations. Several believed that the level of resources to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library were inadequate, and that that had led to a drop in services. They hoped that the library would receive the required funds commensurate with the importance of library services. One speaker on behalf of a large group said that, in his view the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was not yet - despite recent efforts - operating at the highest standards of accepted library practice, and he believed that new technologies would here be particularly useful. He called for a full evaluation of the operations and staffing of the library. Because tremendous advances in information technology

had radically changed the way libraries do business, the speaker, on behalf of a group, suggested that the Department arrange for a review of the library operation by a library specialist, who should also formulate recommendations relating to the latest information technologies. This call was echoed by another speaker, who added that the objective was, in his delegation's opinion, to ultimately save scarce funds and increase library capability for reaching its user-base effectively. Several other delegations suggested that automation could be further improved, although they were dubious about the value of entrusting the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to outside entities.

40. All speakers pointed to the important work being done in the United Nations information centres, and many stressed their especially vital role in the developing countries. Some delegations characterized the centres as the United Nations "display window" to the world, which in many countries represented the only point of contact with United Nations activities and publications. One speaker said that, in his view, they represented a United Nations presence around the world in times of peace, not just in times of conflict. One speaker said that they should become models of high technology for resource-starved peoples in some countries of the world; he believed that there should be greater emphasis placed on equipment, rather than personnel alone. One delegation, on behalf of a large group, said that the technology revolution would have an effect on the information centres, especially in the developed world. He emphasized that distance now placed fewer restrictions on the dissemination of information, as well as the fact that the number of depository libraries had increased and that non-governmental organizations had increased in importance. He requested a thorough evaluation of the objectives, mandate and accomplishments of the information centres, the results of which should be shared with the Committee. This proposal was also supported by another speaker, who emphasized that his delegation was fully aware that information centres in the developing world remained a vital means of information dissemination. The evaluation should give ample emphasis to the centres in the developed world. Many speakers encouraged centres to continue their new levels of information activities initiated over the last years, and called upon them to develop innovative means to reach out to the public.

41. While a number of speakers supported the process of integration, as in their view it ensured a unified approach and enhanced efficiency, as well as economies through sharing, some cautioned that the United Nations information centres needed to retain their functional autonomy in those countries where it was necessary to integrate them with other United Nations field offices. A few speakers expressed reservations about the whole integration exercise. One speaker said that he was an advocate of keeping the information centres as autonomous entities. Another spoke of his concern that the information functions would atrophy in the process and his belief that centres needed to be headed by information professionals. All agreed that integration should be approached on a case-by-case basis and always in consultation with the host Government. One speaker said that he would appreciate a study of the results of the outreach programmes of the United Nations information centres in the form of a breakdown by types of users, with the rationale being to improve services not to provide an excuse for cuts. Another delegation suggested a report that would include the achievements of the integrated centres in terms of the achievements of their established goals. Many speakers expressed their concern that cuts in

the centres would be very ill-timed and could destroy achievements when a well-informed public was vital to the work of the United Nations. Any perceived inefficiencies should not be allowed to undermine this important system, in the opinion of several speakers. Most speakers were well aware of the need for cost-effectiveness, but believed that the system of information centres must be maintained and that the financial ills of the Organization should not serve as a pretext for attacking the existence of the United Nations information centres.

42. Speakers singled out for commendation the work of specific centres in their countries and regions, including United Nations information centres in Accra, Moscow, Islamabad, Kathmandu, Bucharest, Port of Spain and Tokyo. One delegation said that it was appreciative of the reactivation of the centre in Tehran, although its functions should continue to be enhanced further. One speaker said that his Government would increase voluntary funds by 50 per cent to make additional resources available to the information centre. Another speaker regretted the recall of the Director of the United Nations information centre in his country several years ago. He said that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative's obligation did not allow enough time to fulfil his informational role and, accordingly, his Government was willing to strengthen its cooperation with the information centre. In reference to one centre, a speaker said that, while it was developing quite successfully, the growing requirements called for more posts. Another speaker said that the centre in Burkina Faso had suffered and must be reactivated. One delegation suggested providing one post at the United Nations Information Service in Vienna to serve the needs of Croatia. Another said that it was seeking a resource centre in Bratislava, while one speaker called for a regional centre for central Asia in his capital. One speaker said that his country wished to have an information component in the UNDP office in Sofia. A centre in Amman was called for by one delegation.

43. A number of speakers believed the Department's guided tour operation to be a key means of outreach to the public, which offered a very immediate and personal view of the work of the Organization. Tours were seen as an important means of fostering understanding through direct contact between the United Nations and the peoples of the world. It was therefore important, in the view of several delegations, that tours be offered in as many languages as possible and be allowed as broad access as possible to United Nations premises. One delegation said that the tours were a particularly important means of outreach because they were taken largely by young people and children, who would be the future shapers of the next century. Several speakers regretted that financial cut-backs prevented the updating of the tour route at present, and called for this to be done as soon as feasible.

44. At the end of the general debate, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information thanked all delegations for the strong support that he and his staff had received from them. He assured the Committee that he had listened carefully to their constructive comments and would be guided by their wise counsel in the pursuit of the Department's new information strategy. He looked forward to continuing his inter-sessional consultations with the Bureau of the Committee in a spirit of open and honest dialogue to improve further the work of the Department. He emphasized that no progress could be achieved without close collaboration and mutual confidence between the Department and the Committee.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

2/ Ibid., Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/36/21); ibid., Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/39/21); ibid., Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/40/21); ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/41/21); ibid., Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/42/21); ibid., Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/43/21); ibid., Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/44/21); ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/45/21); ibid., Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/46/21); ibid., Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/47/21); ibid., Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/48/21); ibid., Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/49/21).

3/ Ibid., Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/50/21).